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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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It's hard to believe that exactly one week ago, I was playing golf! As occasionally happens here in New England, the weather has changed drastically, for the worse. Although it's almost gone, we had a couple of inches of that wet, heavy snow the other day. After having a good taste of Spring, I'm officially tired of this stuff! Although we've had a terrific winter with regard to snow (not much), it's April. Enough!

And to make matters worse, we lost one of the members of our family the other day. We woke up to discover that our 30-year old African Grey parrot, Beau-Coo, has passed away during the night. This has been a tough loss to take; we had "Bo-Bo" in our family for over 20 years. He was a real character. We're really going to miss him immensely.

It's a shame that our pets don't live long lives. While African Greys can live up to 80 years, Bo-Bo was fairly young. We have two other birds, and one is over 20 years old now. Our two dogs are both pushing 10 years, which is getting old for them as well. For us, these are vital parts of our family; and it's always difficult to lose a member. But, that's the way things are and there's nothing that we can do but try and keep them as healthy as possible, love them, and enjoy the time that we have together.

So, although there are a number of interesting topics I could choose from this week to offer commentary, I'm truly not in much of a motivated mood to do so. This is a multiple holiday week, so I will extend holiday good wishes for those of you who celebrate either of the two holidays.

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, it's just a couple of days before Easter, and we're having my wife's family over for the holiday. I, of course, am in charge of baking the ham... my wife, it seems, is only in

charge of meat products weighing less than 1/4 pound (before cooking).

I don't mind though. I make a kickin' ham, and I actually like doing it. It's the other stuff that I'm not crazy about... you know... the cleaning and washing pots and pans and stuff like that.

Speaking of cleaning, that's what I'll be doing for the next 48 hours or so. We've only lived here for ten months, but already the pack-rat in me is showing. Plus, there's the usual dusting and vacuuming and such to do.

I really hate that domestic stuff. Yeah, yeah, I know. That makes me the same as everyone else, and I'll get no sympathy from you, right? [Grin]

Well, at any rate, Easter is almost here, the ham is in the fridge waiting to hit the oven, the relatives are picking out their Easter bonnets, and the the house WILL get the spring cleaning that it needs. I'd like to mention that this is also Passover (as I'm writing this, it is the fifth day of Passover) for those of the Jewish faith. Happy Passover to any and all of you who observe the holiday.

I've always wondered... is it correct to say "Happy Passover", or is it more appropriate to say "Good Passover"? I'd appreciate anyone who knows setting me straight on that.

Anyway, the messages in the NewsGroup are kind of meager this week, so I figured I'd waste a line or two telling you about the Easter preparations.

Oh, wanna know about my 'special supersecret ham glaze'? That's the reason that my ham is always so good. Hell, even my mother asked me for the recipe! Now, my mother is a cookin'/bakin' fool, and I've never met anyone who tops her on any of her specialties. But when my sister's grand-mother-in-law died a decade ago, I baked a ham for them to have at the house so they wouldn't have to worry about things to eat for a couple of days. Well, my mother was over there consoling them (as mothers and mothers-in-law tend to do) and had a piece of the ham. After ascertaining that it was I who had made the ham, she called me and asked me what was in my glaze, "because it was so good that I had to go back and have a second piece to see if I could figure out what was in it", and "It was just so good... especially the meat that had been sitting in the juice! It wasn't like anything I've had before!"

Now, if you know someone like my mother, who is an accomplished cook and a baker of all manner of confections and goodies, you know how rare a thing it is for someone like that to actually ask for a recipe for anything. That was the single highest compliment I've ever received on anything I've made in the kitchen. I'll cherish that moment for the rest of my life.

So, if you're interested, here's my ham glaze recipe and associated hints:

Take one quarter cup of pineapple juice (from the can of sliced pineapples that you're going to put all over the ham while you're baking it), one quarter cup of apple juice (yep, whatever kind you find in the grocery store, 1 cup of dark brown sugar, 1/8 of a teaspoon of ground clove (I don't bother scoring the ham and studding it with cloves anymore... this works just as well), a dash of cinnamon (JUST a pinch... you don't want even really want to taste it, you just want it

to leave a hint of ’something’ in the glaze) and a dash of nutmeg.

Mix this all up until everything’s combined. It’s going to be thick and mushy, but don’t sweat it when the brown sugar doesn’t all dissolve. Just keep mixing it until it’s all homogeneous.

Now take about a quarter of a cup of this mixture and add a quarter cup of seltzer/club soda. Mix that sucker up and paint it all over the ham until you’ve got no more of the mixture left. It should be nice and sticky and, if you’re baking a spiral-cut ham (I love these puppies!) it’ll work its way into the ham and flavor it from the inside out, while the glaze on the outside seals up the ham so the juices don’t leak out as much. Don’t worry... when you go to cut the ham after baking, just cut it to the bone along the veins of fat, pull it off the bone, and separate the slices from the inside of the ham out. If you do it right, you get the best of both world.

Cover that big hunk ’o hog up with tin foil and bake it as you usually would. About TWO hours before it’s done, pull the ham out and drain half of the liquid out of the roasting pan. Plaster the rest of your glaze mixture all over the ham and stick it back in the oven, fully covered, and pull it out to baste it with the remaining liquid in the pan every 20 minutes or so. That glaze mix is going to saturate the meat and leave you with a wonderful aromatic flavor.

That’s it. Now you know Joe’s Magical Mystery Glaze secret. Use this knowledge wisely. [Grin]

For those of you who keep kosher, I apologize for taking up so much room talking about this, but all I can do is to write about what I know. And right now I know I’d better start getting that ham ready for the oven. [grin]

Okay, let’s get to the news, hints, tips and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

A while back, Guillaume Tello posted this about a mod he made to MagiC:

"I made long ago a modification to MAGIC.RAM (version 5.02) to speed it up at boot time. The same can be done with MAGIC.RAM version 6.2.

My modification skips the floppy detection/boot as it’s the big waste of time when booting and that, this is yet done by TOS before launching Magic."

Deryrck Croker tells Guillaume"

"Nice work! If you can work this idea up into some sort of patching program, it would make it available to those who don’t want to get involved with sector editing. I will be glad to host such a utility on my web site."

After a suitable amount of time, Derryck reports:

"I’m pleased to report that Roger Burrows has wrapped this code up in a

nice patcher program. It’s for MagiC versions 5.xx and 6.xx, is reversible, and is available for download from the MISC section of my web site, http://ddp.atari.org ."

Guillaume tells Derryck:

"Great! [This is] Easier for those who don’t like Hexa(decimal)."

I normally don’t use anything that was posted on April 1st in this column, but this is the only other thread with any substance to it this week. Rob Pilay posts:

"I’ve just finished my latest project, Windows Vista for ATARI ST.

Now you can play all the latest PC games on your ST - without any additional hardware. Because of my superb program code, all Windows Vista compatible programs will work in all the ST’s resolutions.

Windows Vista ST will be available on disk, CD or punchcards.

Here’s the website : www.windowsvistaforatarist.com "

Matthias Arndt takes some of the fun out of it by replying:

"Nice try - it’s April 1st!"

’RustyNutt’ adds:

"I really had a good laugh this morning over this. Thanks!"

Mark Bedingfield adds something that I thought myself:

"Besides, your Atari ST will be faster than a Vista PC now! Jeeeeezzzz it is [poop]"

Everyone’s favorite techie, Alison, adds her thoughts:

"Yes, Vista is absolutely terrible. I sorted out the next door’s wireless a few weeks back and they have a new Vista laptop. Always I reboot the machines a few times to make sure they retain the WPA/WEP stuff in their profile.

Talk about slooooooowww. It’s like 5-minutes odd to boot up on a brand new laptop with so much anti-virus [poop] and gizmo [poop] on it. My IBM 486 laptop running 95 is faster than theirs. And mine is 15-years old!!

Glad I was there in the 80’s.... No really, I am so glad.

This machine I’m typing this on is an AMD Athlon 2600+ running 98SE, 512MBytes of RAM, a 3COM 54b adapter. It boots in 10-seconds flat."

Martin Tarenskeen adds:

"Did anyone try to measure the time it takes to boot a simple ST or Falcon with plain TOS and not too many (or no) AUTO folder programs and desktop accessories? I really love(d) that TOS-in-ROM concept! But things like FreeMiNT and NVDI slow down the boot process."

'Coda' tells Martin:

"My Mac boots in 0.000 seconds. Well of course it doesn't, but the fact is - that it seldom gets rebooted. It stays on 24/7, eats only 20W of power when idle (30W at full tilt), and never crashes.

My other half's is a PII-400 dell laptop running XP SP1 (before the nightmare of SP2), and that's also plenty quick enough for daily email/ internet/word/excel for the wife.

Vista - Just Say No."

RustyNutt adds:

"The humor was in why would anyone want to do this?!?!

My Falcon runs [Windows] 3.11 on a 286 expansion card, but to be sure, it's only a novelty. Not that the Falcon is able to do this, it's the microsoft part....."

Well there ya go... from an April Fools' joke to a real, honest-to-goodness thingamabob. Where else but in the Atari world, huh?

Well folks, that's it for this time around. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Sony Cuts PSP Price!
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Bonnell Quits Atari!
                                  Wii Are The Champion!
                                  And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Sony Cuts Price of PlayStation Portable

Sony announced today that it is cutting the price of its PlayStation Portable gaming handheld from $199 to $169.

Jack Tretton, president and CEO of Sony Computer Entertainment America, said that Sony has shipped more than 25 million PSPs to stores and that volume is allowing it to become more efficient in manufacturing. Consequently, he said, Sony can pass on its cost savings to consumers.

The PSP Core Pack will now be priced closer to the rival Nintendo DS, which at $129 had sold more than 35 million units as of the end of December. Tretton said that after two years on the market the PSP is achieving Sony's goal of expanding the handheld gaming market to older console gamers who didn't play Nintendo handhelds.

The average age of the 7.5 million PSP owners in North America is 24, and only 10 percent of those are DS owners, Tretton said.

There are more than 250 titles on the PSP now, with the top hits including Grand Theft Auto Liberty City Stories, Star Wars Battlefront 2, Need for Speed ost Wanted, SOCOM US Navy Seals, and Madden.

The PSP debuted in March 2005 at $249 in North America, about four months after the debut of the $149 Nintendo DS. The PSP has a 16:9 widescreen display and the ability to play movies, music, games and access the Internet.

Analysts had expected Sony to trim the price after the close of its March 31 fiscal year because it has the potential to hurt the Japanese company's already weak bottom line.

Wii Are The Champions?

The anticipated battle between Microsoft's Xbox 360 and Sony's PlayStation 3 for videogame console supremacy has become a sideshow to the unexpected rise of Nintendo's Wii as the new-generation game console of choice.

Once a dark-horse contender, the Wii has outsold both its competitors in recent months. According to sales data from the NPD Group, the Wii sold 335,000 units in February to the Xbox 360's 228,000 and the PS3's 127,000.

Of the three new-generation game consoles, the Xbox 360 has sold the most at 5 million units in the United States alone, but that's mainly due to the fact that it was released a full year earlier than either the Wii or the PS3. Since they first hit shelves last November, the PS3 has sold 1.1 million units while the Wii has tallied 1.86 million.

What's interesting is that the Wii achieved this feat not by offering a lot of multimedia bells and whistles like its competitors do, but by simply focusing on games.

"We've seen Nintendo expand the marketplace and grow it beyond the traditional gamer," says Michael Gartenberg of Jupiter Research. "They

really redefined the videogame experience by creating something new and different."

That innovation is the Wii controller, a motion-sensitive wand that allows gamers to control the action onscreen by waving the device about rather than jostling a joystick and pushing buttons.

That controller and the games developed for it have captured the imagination of both the core gamer demographic and their parents, wives and other family members.

So what does that say about Sony and Microsoft, which also are hoping to attract nongamers to their respective new-generation consoles by positioning them as home entertainment hubs?

Both consoles contain hard drives to store content and allow users to stream music and video content from their home computers. The PS3 features a Blu-ray DVD player and is developing a Second Life-style virtual world called PS3 Home, while the Xbox Live Marketplace offers downloadable movies and TV shows.

"Microsoft and Sony clearly have larger aspirations for the game console in the living room as a portal for some of the other services they're trying to sell," Gartenberg says. "The hardcore gamer may be the one purchasing the console, but other family members may use the other features. Nintendo's approach has been to get nongamers playing games."

According to NPD Group spokesman David Riley, the Wii's "gaming first" message is much easier for nongamers to grasp than Microsoft and Sony's more complicated home entertainment message.

"While they have that capability, it's not that easy to use," he says. "It's going to be a ways off before that capability becomes mainstream."

Yet that's not to say the effort is in vain. Microsoft is showing signs of early success with its decision to add TV and movie downloads to the Xbox Live Marketplace. Since first making such content available last November, the company says it has seen a 400% increase in downloads. Microsoft did not reveal exactly how many downloads that figure represented.

"All of these strategies are viable," Gartenberg says. "It's not a question of one over the other. Nintendo has demonstrated that there are multiple ways to get into the hearts and minds of other family members."

Other factors also play a role in the Wii's early success. At $250, the Wii is the cheapest option on the shelves, with the Xbox 360 carrying a $400 tab and the PS3 a whopping $600. Additionally, the PS3 was hampered early on with severe product shortages and a dearth of blockbuster games that show off the system's capabilities.

But it's far too early to pick the ultimate winner. Gaming industry press and analysts still feel the PS3 has the chops to dominate in the end. Reviews at videogame site GameSpot say that "the PS3 has all the processor, graphics and communications power necessary to win this generation," while Electronic Arts departing CEO Larry Probst told a Web conference audience that he believed the PS3 will prove the ultimate winner.

Meanwhile, the Xbox 360 is taking strong lead in the number of games

sold. The Xbox 360 has six titles in the top 10 for February - including the No. 1 title - while Wii has three and PS3 none (PS2 title "Guitar Hero" took the final spot). Additionally, Xbox 360 owners buy far more games than the owners of other consoles at a rate of 5.4 games per 360 owner. That rate falls to 2.3 for the PS3 and 2.8 for the Wii.

That leaves the Wii, for now, with everything to lose.

"Their challenge going forward is to make sure this is not a passing fad by getting a stream of content into the market," Gartenberg says. "The game console purchase driver is still going to be first and foremost games. The secondary stuff is the icing on the cake."

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!
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Atari, Inc. Announces Departure of Bruno Bonnell

Atari, Inc. announced Thursday the departure of Bruno Bonnell, effective immediately, from all of his positions at Atari, Inc.

Bonnell was the Chairman of the Board, Chief Creative Officer, Acting Chief Financial Officer and a director of Atari. Bonnell’s departure from Atari came at the same time as Bonnell’s departure from his positions as the Chief Executive Officer and a director of Infogrames and from all his positions with subsidiaries of Infogrames.

Bruno Bonnell stated, "Since 2000 I have had the privilege of carrying the Atari flag in our industry. I wish the very best to all the teams moving on with the company, and I have no doubt in their talent and experiences to bring Atari, Inc. to the top."

David Pierce, the President and Chief Executive Officer of Atari, said, "Bruno Bonnell is a legend in the video games business. He was one of the early participants in the industry as we know it, and was responsible for major successes both on the creative and on the corporate side. We wish Bruno success with any future undertakings, and as a result of his dedication and efforts with Atari, Inc., we are well-positioned for our future endeavors."

HP is Ready to Play

Any lingering image of Hewlett-Packard Co. as a stodgy company was dispelled Wednesday night in San Francisco as the company called "Game On" in its bid for a piece of the online gaming industry.

The company’s HP Labs research center is developing technology that could be incorporated into next-generation personal computers that play

interactive video games designed for the broadband era. By doing so, HP thinks it can compete against a surge in popularity of console-style games such as Microsoft Corp.’s Xbox, Sony Corp.’s PlayStation and Nintendo Co. Ltd.’s Wii.

At an event that drew HP officials, technology partners and reporters, the company showed off prototypes of gaming technologies, including gaming PCs from VoodooPC, which HP acquired in the fourth quarter of 2006. The gaming unit within HP’s Technology Solutions Group is called "Game On."

The prototypes include computers with curved screens so someone playing a race car game can see the track they’re driving on ahead and to their sides and a touch-screen computer built into a coffee table so players can sit on all sides and participate. HP also played a video in which a teenage boy walks through a big city with his handheld game player. He points the device at a portion of the city’s skyline, the device scans the outline of the buildings in view and creates a game scene from that image.

While impressive, HP has a steep hill to climb. Sales of gaming consoles grew 33 percent in 2006 while sales of gaming PCs grew by only 1 percent, according to the retail sales tracking firm NPD Group Inc. While HP doesn’t expect consumers to camp outside retail stores overnight to buy an HP, as they for the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 when they launched, there are other more promising signs of market potential.

Sales of gaming software that runs on PCs reached US$6 billion globally in 2006 and are forecast to hit $12 billion by 2010, said Rick Wickham, director of games for Windows for Microsoft, citing figures from IDC.

Rahul Sood, chief technology officer of HP’s global gaming business unit, who came over from VoodooPC, sees HP offering a premium line of gaming PCs priced higher than its current line of HP and Compaq branded PCs, but lower than VoodooPC’s custom-made models, which can sell for $8,000.

Asked specifically if HP plans to soon introduce a line of PCs such as that, Shane Robison, executive vice president and HP’s chief strategy technology officer, said, "I am not allowed to go there."

HP is not the first PC maker to try to branch out into high-end gaming PCs. Dell Inc. acquired Alienware Corp. in March 2006, for an undisclosed amount. But HP appears to be taking advantage of its new relationship with VoodooPC more quickly.

HP’s move into gaming could be a "game-changing" move, said Rob Enderle, lead analyst with technology research firm The Enderle Group. HP could try selling high-margin gaming PCs to escape from the low-margin PC market it competes in with every other PC maker. But it could also be a risky move.

"The buyer may say they don’t want one and that is the risk when you make a game changer. You make a guess at where the market is going and you get there first," Enderle said. "If you guess wrong you’re there all by yourself."

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Google Guffaw: High-Speed Internet John

Presiding over a company with a market value of $143 billion apparently gives Silicon Valley’s most famous billionaires a good sense of humor, and a case of corporate potty mouth.

Senior executives at Google Inc. launched their annual April Fools’ Day prank Sunday, posting a link on the company’s home page to a site offering consumers free high-speed wireless Internet through their home plumbing systems.

Code-named "Dark Porcelain," Google said its "Toilet Internet Service Provider" (TiSP) works with Microsoft Corp.’s new Windows Vista operating system. But sorry, septic tanks are incompatible with the system’s requirements.

The gag included a mock press release quoting Google co-founder and president Larry Page, a step-by-step online installation manual, and a scatological selection of Frequently Asked Questions. On some Google sites, the company’s official logo, a multicolored "Google" that changes according to the season and on holidays, substituted a commode for the second "g."

"There’s actually a thriving little underground community that’s been studying this exact solution for a long time," Page said in the facetious statement. "And today our Toilet ISP team is pleased to be leading the way through the sewers, up out of your toilet and, splat, right onto your PC."

Marissa Mayer, a Google vice president, called TiSP a "breakthrough product, particularly for those users who, like Larry himself, do much of their best thinking in the bathroom."

TiSP is the latest April Fools joke at the Mountain View, Calif.-based company, where hijinks pervade cubicles all year long. In blogs, Google employees joke about the recent injection of green dye into milk in the cafeteria, while another talks about zany underlings filling the vice president of engineering’s office with sand.

Eric Raymond, a software developer in Malvern, Pa., and author of the New Hacker’s Dictionary, said TiSP nailed several important tenets of hacker humor.

The concept of free wireless access parallels a legitimate, four-year deal between Google and EarthLink Inc. to provide free wireless Internet service throughout San Francisco starting in early 2008.

As part of the spoof, Google said TiSP would be offered in three speeds: Trickle, The No. 2, and Royal Flush.

"The leitmotif of hacker humor is precise reasoning from utterly bizarre premises, and once you’re in that groove, you’re absolutely fearless about going deeper," Raymond said. "We also have a tendency to deliberately zigzag between highly intellectual humor and utter slapstick. The more

zigzags you can manage in a single spoof, the funnier it is."

On the Net:

Google prank: http://www.google.com/tisp/

ICANN Rejection of .XXX Domain Might Bring Litigation

Last Friday, the International Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers voted 9-5 to reject a proposal by ICM Registry to set up and operate a .xxx domain for sex-related sites. In the wake of ICANN's decision, ICM Registry CEO Stuart Lawley said that the dispute will likely wind up in court.

"This will probably go into litigation," Lawley said. "There are multiple prongs for challenging the ICANN decision."

The plan that ICANN rejected last week was the third version of ICM Registry's proposal, which was originally filed in 2000. After objections were raised by the U.S. government, ICM Registry amended its proposal in 2004 to include the creation of an independent entity, the International Foundation for Online Responsibility. Under the terms of ICM Registry's proposal, IFOR would be responsible for determining whether .xxx sites were in compliance with rules established for the new domain.

Lawley said he was not surprised by the outcome. "No," he said, "we saw the writing on the wall. We held a teleconference with ICANN last month and could tell the outcome from the way the conversation was going."

Lawley said that despite the fact that ICM Registry had complied with ICANN's criteria for a new top-level domain, the Bush administration has been actively pressuring ICANN to reject the .xxx proposal.

"We're clearly of the opinion, and we know for a fact," Lawley said, "that the U.S. government intervened and prevented the signing of the August 2005 contract between ICANN and ICM Registry."

ICANN Board member Susan Crawford, who voted in favor of the new top-level domain, suggested in her blog that ICANN had in fact given in to governmental pressure.

"I am troubled by the path the Board has followed on this issue since I joined the Board in December of 2005," she wrote. "I would like to make two points. First, ICANN only creates problems for itself when it acts in an ad hoc fashion in response to political pressures. Second, ICANN should take itself seriously as a private governance institution with a limited mandate and should resist efforts by governments to veto what it does."

Crawford pointed out that the United States was not the only government to oppose the .xxx domain. The Board also received objections from Australia, Brazil, and several other countries.

In May 2006, following ICANN's decision not to sign the .xxx TLD contract, ICM Registry filed suit against the U.S. Departments of Commerce and State, arguing that those agencies have no right to withhold e-mails dealing with the Bush administration's response to the .xxx proposal. ICM Registry believes that it can show that the U.S. government exerted undue

influence on the purportedly independent body.

Lawley said that a U.S. District Court judge recently ruled in favor of ICM Registry and is ordering the U.S. Government to turn over more relevant e-mails. "A federal judge has agreed with our version of the facts," Lawley said, "and now we're reviewing our options from here on out. There are many different possible approaches."

His chief objection, Lawley added, was that ICANN's decision was fundamentally unfair.

"If you want to set up the process to prevent a .gay or .muslim TLD, well go ahead, you can set your own rules; but what you can't do is change the rules in the middle of the game," Lawley said. "We followed the rules as they stood in 2004 to the letter, and they simply didn't like the outcome."

VeriSign To Increase .com, .net Domain Fees

VeriSign is planning to raise the wholesale cost of registering a .com or .net domain name in October to generate more money for infrastructure improvements, the company announced on Thursday.

The increases are the first of several VeriSign is allowed impose through 2012 under an agreement with ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers), the overseer of the Internet's addressing system. VeriSign is the official registry for domain names ending in .com, .net, .cc, and .tv.

On Oct. 15, the wholesale price of a .com domain will go from $6 to $6.42, a 7 percent hike and the maximum annual percentage increase allowed under the March 2006 agreement with ICANN. A .net domain name will increase 10 percent, from 3.50 to $3.85.

VeriSign can't raise the price of the .com domain registrations more than 7 percent annually in four years of the six-year agreement with ICANN, which runs through 2012. However, VeriSign is allowed to raise prices for security reasons or in respect to new ICANN policies if there hasn't been a formal price increase that year.

The impact of the price hike on domain name owners could vary. VeriSign charges those fees to registrars, which may package domain name registration service with other services, such as Web site hosting.

Those registrars may set their own pricing for their services to consumers or businesses, as long as they pay VeriSign the basic domain registration fee. VeriSign said it manages relationships with more than 150 ICANN-accredited registrars that submit 100 million domain name transactions daily.

At the end of 2006, .com and .net domains numbered 65 million with new ones added at an average of 2.1 million per month, according to VeriSign statistics released last month. With the new price increases, VeriSign will boost its revenue by at least $22.7 million.

VeriSign said the new revenue will be invested in equipment that deals with requests for Internet sites on the .com and .net domains. VeriSign

runs a network of servers that are part of the DNS, which enables domain names, such as www.idg.com, to be translated into numerical Web site addresses that can be called into a Web browser.

Web surfers are putting more pressure on the DNS system by making more requests for Web sites, VeriSign said. The company is handling around 30 billion queries a day on its infrastructure, up from 1 billion in 2000.

In February, VeriSign said it plans to invest $100 million over the next three years in its DNS infrastructure. The project, called Titan, will boost VeriSign’s bandwidth from 20Gbps to more than 200Gbps, allowing it to respond to more than 4 trillion DNS queries a day.

ICANN Weighs Recommendation To Go Private

Looking to fortify its charter, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) recently released a report indicating it would like to change its legal status and become a private entity.

The nonprofit private-public partnership oversees Internet Protocol address space allocation and domain name system management, among ther responsibilities.

In a March 23 report (PDF), the strategy committee appointed by ICANN president Paul Twomey encouraged the board of directors to explore options for becoming a private international organization based in the United States.

"The Committee wants to be clear that in referring to a private international organization it is not suggesting a treaty organization or an intergovernmental organization," the report said.

"The balancing of these aspects is essential to maintaining not only a single lobal interoperable Internet, but also a model that is sufficiently versatile to adjust to the Internet’s growth and development," the report said. "The private sector based multi-stakeholder model repeatedly demonstrates itself as the most viable, responsive, mechanism to ensure stability and security of the Internet’s future."

The committee also stated that ICANN should maintain its multistakeholder model, its processes for organizational improvement outlined in its bylaws and mechanisms for accountability. The report stated that ICANN may consider incorporating California state laws or U.S. federal rules into its arbitration process.

No timetables for legal changes to the ICANN charter have been publicly disclosed.

"The Committee considers such developments may contribute to the further improvement of stability," the report said.

British Hacker Loses U.S. Extradition Appeal

A British computer expert accused by Washington of the "biggest military hack of all time" lost an appeal on Tuesday against plans to extradite him to the United States to stand trial.

Gary McKinnon was arrested in 2002 following charges by U.S. prosecutors that he illegally accessed 97 government computers - including Pentagon, U.S. army, navy and NASA systems - causing $700,000 worth of damage.

Two of Britain’s leading judges rejected a High Court challenge by McKinnon to an earlier court order backed by Britain’s Home Secretary that he should be extradited.

"We do not find any grounds of appeal against the decision," said one of the judges, Lord Justice Maurice Kay.

"Mr McKinnon’s conduct was intentional and calculated to influence and affect the U.S. government by intimidation and coercion."

"As a result of his conduct, damage was caused to computers by impairing their integrity, availability and operation of programs, systems, information and data on the computers, rendering them unreliable," Kay said.

McKinnon’s lawyers had argued that sending him to the United States would breach his human rights and should not be allowed on the basis that his extradition was sought "for the purpose of prosecuting him on account of his nationality or political opinions."

McKinnon, whose hacking name was "Solo," has admitted gaining access to U.S. government computers but denies causing any damage.

At the time of his indictment, Paul McNulty, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, said "Mr McKinnon is charged with the biggest military computer hack of all time."

If found guilty in the U.S, McKinnon could face up to 70 years in jail and fines of up to $1.75 million.

He is expected to apply to the House of Lords, Britain’s highest court, for permission to challenge Tuesday’s ruling.

Retail Trade, FBI Fight Organized Theft

Two leading retail industry associations have teamed up with the Federal Bureau of Investigations to create a national online database that will allow merchants to share information to fight organized retail theft.

The database, scheduled to debut Monday with 40 retailers, consolidates efforts made by the National Retail Federation and the Retail Industry Leaders Association. Both organizations had launched their own password-protected online national crime data bases last year.

Previously, merchants had never shared information, so organized rings could hit various stores in one area without being detected.

Joseph LaRocca, NRF’s vice president of loss prevention, said that this data base called Law Enforcement Retail Partnership Network will become

the "national platform" for sharing retail crime information.

In a statement, FBI Supervisory Special Agent Brian Nadeau, program manager for the FBI's Organized Retail Theft program, said that this tool "will create a stronger partnership between retailers and law enforcement to tackle a growing problem and disrupt criminal organizations."

Increasingly, the nation's retailers are focusing less on petty crimes and more on organized retail theft, which costs the industry $30 billion annually and rising. Customers also pay a hefty price. NRF, the industry's largest trade group, estimates that shoppers pay almost 2 cents on every dollar to cover the cost of retail theft.

According to a recent poll conducted by NRF, 81 percent of retailers surveyed said they have been a victim of organized retail crime. Nearly half of those polled also had seen an increase in organized retail crime activity in their stores.

Unlike average shoplifters who steal for themselves, those involved in organized crime steal the goods and resell to flea markets, pawn shops or on the Internet.

For a long time, LaRocca said that these cases were hard to crack because stores had been secretive about giving out information. And state laws have been weak on shoplifting. Moreover, shoplifting doesn't become a federal crime until at least $5,000 in stolen merchandise crosses a state line. U.S attorney general's offices don't prosecute unless the merchandise is worth $50,000.

With this tool, merchants will be able to remain anonymous. Retailers who log onto the secure Web portal choose which information about a crime they want to be made public, and don't have to identify themselves initially. However, stores have to at least provide basic information about the crime, including the date and time it occurred, the dollar amount stolen and the type of retailer involved, LaRocca said.

Federated Department Stores Inc.'s Macy's, Limited Brands Inc., and American Eagle Outfitters Inc. are among participating retailers that were willing to disclose their names, LaRocca said.

LaRocca said that NRF's data base, which was launched last June, has already made some inroads, collecting information on about 14,000 incidents, and identifying certain trends.

Based on information collected, the top states that have experienced the most organized crime-related incidents are California, New York, Florida, New Jersey and Texas. LaRocca said that the suburban New York area - New York, New Jersey and Connecticut - has had the most of incidents.

One of the early success stories, LaRocca said, was law enforcement's ability to tie two similar organized crime incidents that occurred late last year to two different retailers in Southern California to the same ring as a result of merchants' sharing of information. Law enforcement officials are working to crack the case, said LaRocca, who declined to identify the merchants.

Missing IRS Laptops Phone Home

The U.S. Internal Revenue Service (IRS) may not be doing a very good job of encrypting data on its laptops, but it does have a way to recover its lost equipment.

In fact, thieves looking to steal from the U.S. Department of the Treasury may find themselves behind bars, thanks to tracking software used by the IRS to contact investigators whenever a laptop is stolen.

Nearly 500 IRS laptops went missing in a three year period between 2003 and 2006, according to the agency that oversees the IRS, called the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA).

TIGTA recently published a memo illustrating how the agency could do a better job at protecting taxpayers' data. For example, TIGTA found that nearly half of the 100 IRS laptop computers that it tested had unencrypted sensitive data, relating to both IRS employees and taxpayers.

The report's conclusion? Well, TIGTA left little room for guesswork there, entitling its memo: "The Internal Revenue Service Is Not Adequately Protecting Taxpayer Data on Laptop Computers."

However, in an earlier TIGTA report presented to Congress late last year, the oversight agency listed a few of the high-tech tricks the IRS uses for security.

The agency has combined video technology with specialized software to keep track of some PCs, the report says.

The IRS uses video-over-Internet technology to remotely operate surveillance cameras on its premises, and it also has special software that lets IRS PCs notify government agencies if the computer goes missing. The software can also provide investigators with the machine's IP address once it pops back up on the Internet. With the IP address in hand, Treasury Department investigators have been able to identify criminal suspects and recover stolen equipment, the report states.

Although PC thefts have been making front page news for more than a year now, observers say these type of laptop recovery systems are just starting to get the government's attention. "I think this is below a lot of people's radar," said Richard Smith, an Internet security consultant with Boston Software Forensics.

One company that sells this type of PC recovery service, Vancouver's Absolute Software Corp., says that it has been stepping up dialogue with the U.S federal government over the past year and a half.

To date, the company counts NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) and the U.S. General Services Administration among its customers.

Absolute's software, which is installed in the firmware and the PC's hard drive, is extremely difficult to remove. It can not only report the location of a stolen computer, but it can also be used to wipe data from a machine after it's been stolen, said John Livingston, the company's chairman and CEO.

Absolute is one of about a half-dozen companies, including CyberAngel Security Solutions Inc. and Brigadoon Software Inc., that sell this type of PC recovery product. And while Livingston admits that the market for

these services is "still in the early part of the adoption curve," he says that Absolute has now signed up about 1 million subscribers. "We've gotten thousands of stolen computers back. We do it every day," he said.

Hotmail Glitches Reported

Some of the beta testers for Microsoft Corp.'s Windows Live Hotmail service are getting an increase in storage, but the extra capacity isn't being introduced as smoothly as some of them might hope.

The users will see from their storage meter that they now have 4 G-bytes of storage, up from 2 G-bytes before. But the extra storage might not actually have been assigned to their accounts yet, according to a company blog posting.

"This seems like putting the cart before the horse," the posting says. "The reason for this is that the storage upgrade is being gradually rolled across the universe and does not immediately change every account at the same time."

The problem should resolve itself as the upgrade continues over the next two weeks, Microsoft said. The expanded storage is only for "Hotmail Plus" customers who are beta testing Windows Live Hotmail, a revamped version of the company's Web e-mail service.

Hotmail Plus customers pay US$19.95 per year for a 2G-byte account and extras such as the ability to send 20 M-byte attachments.

Microsoft's free Hotmail service offers 1 G-byte of storage and a 10 M-byte attachment limit. By comparison, Google Inc.'s Gmail offers 2.6 G-bytes of storage for free and Yahoo Inc.'s free e-mail includes 1 G-byte of storage.

Last month, Microsoft rolled out another feature upgrade, M10, for the Windows Live Hotmail beta, which is supposed to improve its speed and reliability.

Web News Readers Have Greater Attention Span

People who use the Internet to read the news have a greater attention span than print readers, according to a U.S. study that refutes the idea that Web surfers jump around and don't read much.

The EyeTrack07 survey by the Poynter Institute, a Florida-based journalism school, found online readers read 77 percent of what they chose to read while broadsheet newspaper readers read an average of 62 percent, and tabloid readers about 57 percent.

Sara Quinn, director of the Poynter EyeTrack07 project, said this was the first large public study internationally to compare the differences between how people read the news online and in newspapers.

She said they were surprised to find that such a large percentage of story text was read online as this exploded the myth that Web readers had

a shorter attention span.

"Nearly two-thirds of online readers, once they chose a particular item to read, read all of text," Quinn told Reuters on Thursday at the American Society of Newspaper Editors' annual conference where the study was released.

"That speaks to the power of long-form journalism."

The study also found that people paid more attention to items written in a question and answer format or as lists, and preferred documentary news photographs to staged or studio pictures.

The study involved testing nearly 600 readers in four U.S. markets - readers of the Rocky Mountain News in Denver, The St. Petersburg Times in Florida, the Star Tribune of Minneapolis, and the Philadelphia Daily News.

The test subjects, who were 49 percent women and 51 percent men aged between 18 and 60, were asked to read that day's edition in either print or online over 30 publication days.

Two small cameras were mounted above the subject's right eye to monitor what they were reading. They were allowed to read whatever they liked.

The study found about 75 percent of print readers were methodical compared to half of online readers.

Methodical readers tend to read from top to bottom without much scanning around the page, read in a two-page view when reading in print, and re-read some material.

But whether online readers were methodical or scanners, they read about the same volume of story text.

Quinn said a prototype test also found that people answered more questions about a news item correctly if the information had been presented in an alternative manner rather than traditional narrative.

This could have been a question and answer format, a timeline, short sidebar or a list.

"Subjects paid an average of 15 percent more attention to alternative story forms than to regular story text in print. In broadsheet, this figure rose to 30 percent," the study said.

Large headlines and photos in print were looked a first but online readers went for navigation bars and teasers.

Quinn said more findings from the study would be released at the Poynter conference in April.

McClatchy's Deal With Yahoo Opens Doors

Many newspaper publishers still consider major Internet companies to be a threat, but a deal announced last week to bring foreign news and commentary to Yahoo Inc. from correspondents at McClatchy Co. newspapers could open the way to even more cooperation between print and online

media.

Yahoo, a major online destination for news, regularly displays foreign news from a number of outlets including Reuters Group PLC, The Associated Press and Agence-France Presse, as well as National Public Radio and the Christian Science Monitor newspaper. Yahoo also has links to stories in other outlets and lets readers pull in news from outside sites that use an online syndication tool called RSS feeds.

The arrangement with McClatchy - which owns 31 newspapers including The Miami Herald and The Sacramento Bee - would bring stories from four of McClatchy's eight foreign bureaus, mainly in the Middle East and Asia, as well as exclusive online material including notebook-type blog postings from correspondents, links to other resources and travel tips, according to Howard Weaver, McClatchy's vice president for news.

"We're going into it with a small subsection of our content and see how it goes," Weaver said. "We have really high quality, exclusive content. Yahoo has the largest audience in the world. That seems like a pretty obvious thing to do."

Scott Moore, the head of news and information at Yahoo, said the company has found "significant interest" from other well-known news organizations about forming similar partnerships. Moore declined to name the organizations or provide other details, other than to say there could be announcements of other deals over the next two to three months.

Foreign news is a major draw for visitors to Yahoo, Moore said, and is the No. 3 most popular category of news on the site following "Top News," a category with largely domestic news stories, and business news.

While the Yahoo-McClatchy deal will start off on a relatively modest scale, analysts saw it as an intriguing new kind of collaboration between companies that had traditionally seen each other as rivals but who actually had complementary strengths that could make such ventures fruitful for both sides.

Mike Simonton, newspaper analyst at the credit ratings service Fitch Ratings Inc., said newspapers are transforming themselves from being primarily distributors of information to producers of news that can then be distributed by other means.

Large Internet companies like Yahoo and Google Inc. "need the type of trusted content that newspaper companies provide," Simonton said, while newspapers need new avenues of distribution. "I think the publishers are starting to see that Yahoo and Google can really be more partners than competitors, and Yahoo is seeing that as well."

Many newspaper publishers have been cutting back on costs in recent years due to declining circulation and advertising, and several have cut back on foreign bureaus. Last year Tribune Co. consolidated the foreign staff across its newspapers, and in January The Boston Globe, which is owned by The New York Times, closed its last three remaining foreign bureaus.

For newspaper companies that still maintain significant foreign staffs, such as the New York Times, The Washington Post Co. and Dow Jones & Co., publisher of The Wall Street Journal, cutting deals with online providers could provide new revenues and audiences for coverage they are already paying for.

"I think it sets up all kinds of interesting possibilities," said Ken Doctor, media analyst for Outsell Inc., a market research and consulting firm based in Burlingame, Calif. "I would expect to see more of these kinds of deals."

The Washington Post, which has 30 foreign correspondents, currently distributes news online through a joint venture with Tribune's Los Angeles Times. Spokesman Eric Grant declined to elaborate on other plans the paper might be considering.

Dow Jones said in a statement that it would "would certainly consider licensing our foreign news to sites and portals if the partnership was an effective revenue or traffic driver, or both."

Tribune declined to comment, and Catherine Mathis, a spokeswoman for The New York Times, said the company is "exploring alternatives for distributing our journalism and evaluating ways we can partner with others."

McClatchy's Weaver indicated that the company was still feeling its way in the growing world of online distribution and figuring out how best to position itself.

"We are recognizing that there are opportunities where people used to see problems," Weaver said.

As for his new partners over at Yahoo, he's expecting plenty more contact with them. "These are new entries in my Rolodex," he said.

BlackBerrys, Laptops Blur Work/Home Balance

Staying in touch constantly by using laptops, BlackBerrys and other wireless devices has blurred the line between a person's professional and personal life, according to a new survey.

Seventy five percent of people questioned in a survey by Yahoo! HotJobs said they used their wireless devices equally for work and personal reasons.

Nearly 30 percent were so attached to them they only switched them off while sleeping.

"Wireless devices are powerful communications tools," Susan Vobejda, vice president of marketing at Yahoo! HotJobs, said in a statement.

"While they were intended to provide convenience and flexibility for workers' lives, they have changed the physical parameters of the workplace and extended the work day. Professionals can work from anywhere and connect at any time."

The online survey of 900 professionals revealed that 81 percent stay connected with a mobile phone, 65 percent use a laptop to keep in touch and 19 percent have adopted smartphones, cell phones with computer-like functions.

Most of the people who responded to the poll had favorable reactions to wireless devices but slightly more than a quarter think they are kept on

a permanent corporate leash.

Vobejda said the wireless devices are a professional reality and people must set limits.

"With 67 percent of respondents admitting to having used a wireless device to connect to work while on vacation, signs indicated that the American workforce may be facing burnout," she added.

People who can’t turn off the devices are advised to speak up if they feel they are being overworked, and to learn to say ’no’ if work is encroaching too much on personal time.

Instead of using wireless devices to arrange meetings and business appointments, they should use them to schedule some free time.

"It’s important for people to set limits on when and how to disengage in order to maintain work-life balance," Vobejda added.

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